



Wyoming National Guard RETIREE NEWS

Volume V, Number 1 Published by Wyoming Military Department for Retirees and Veterans News March 2006

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

There has been a very positive reaction since the Wyoming National Guard Retiree and Wyoming Veterans' Commission (WVC) Newsletters were combined into one publication beginning in Jul 04. The only negative is the lack of veteran mailings. First half of the publication will always be dedicated to information for WY NG retirees/spouses/widows. Last half will contain news pertinent to Wyoming veterans. Newsletter will be published three times a year (Mar, Jul & Nov).

You are encouraged to read the entire newsletter as there will be items of interest to any person with prior military affiliation. To help determine what is applicable, a military retiree is a person who completed 20 years or more of satisfactory military service and is receiving or eligible to receive at age 60 retired pay; a veteran is one who has served honorably for any length of time in the active United States Armed Forces; a surviving spouse is the widow of a deceased military retiree and is receiving a monthly annuity; all military retirees are considered to be veterans.

Readers are urged to provide informative material or article requests, etc. Comments, good or bad, are welcome. Send annually during the period 15 Apr-15 Nov to: Bob Holmes, 1508 Hot Springs Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82001-5361, (307) 632-7566, Fax (307) 778-8741; during 15 Nov-15 Apr send to: 2134 North Ramona Ave., Casa Grande, AZ 85222-1325, (520) 426-1663. Year around - cell: (307) 630-1676 and email: RHolmes632@aol.com.

WY NG RETIRED CAPS

(Army or Air) Retired caps are still available for sale through the WY Militia Historical Society (WMHS). Cost is \$10 per cap plus \$2 mailing fee. Make \$12 check payable to WMHS and send to the address shown in the article above. Or pick one up personally for \$10 whenever you are close to the addresses shown. Be sure to specify which cap. They make a great gift for a newly retired WY NG.

WMHS

Wyoming Militia Historical Society (WMHS) has good news, bad news to report. The inventory of the collection has an excellent start. Many items have been entered into a computerized system. Storage containers have arrived. These acid-free boxes will store the trophies, plaques, books, canteens, patches, historical papers, etc. They will be labeled and the location will be noted in the computer program file. All the inventory could be ready for the storage area in the new Wyoming National Guard headquarters building when it is finished.

The bad news is that the funds for this project have expired, but the inventory is incomplete. It is hoped presently convened state legislature will help us complete the inventory. There were no funds allocated in the budget for this project at the time of this writing.

Membership dues for the WMHS are \$10.00 and collected annually by calendar year. New and old members can send their 2006 dues to the treasurer, Don Whitman, at 5518 Marshall Road, Cheyenne, WY 82009. Make checks payable to the WMHS.

SBP ANNUITIES

It did really happen. The Widows Tax, formerly known as Age 62 SBP Offset, began to be eliminated effective last 1 Oct 2005. However, it appears the widow has to earn it first as the increase was not realized until 1 Nov 2005. Supposedly, the increase was to take the annuity up to 40% of what the sponsor would have been receiving if still alive. Percent of increase would vary as some widows were at less than 35% and some a little more than 35%, dependent on how the calculations were figured in the beginning. The next jump will take the widow's annuities up to 45% effective 1 Apr 2006, but it appears they will not see the increase until 1 May. That will be followed by an increase to 50% 1 Apr 07 and finally to 55% on 1 Apr 08, where it should have been all along!

HOTLINES

WMD has permanent toll-free hotlines for the Retirement Service Offices (RSO), located in Cheyenne, for answering questions, assisting in processing claims, issuing ID cards, car registration, etc., for retirees, spouses and widows. They can acquire and complete all forms necessary for processing claims. Grey area retirees reaching age 60 and spouses recently widowed must utilize this service. Particularly widows in order to start their authorized survivor benefit annuities. ID cards can now only be issued with recipient present to ensure proper enrollment into DEERS. Individuals need to contact a RSO to arrange a time and place for cards to be issued.

ARNG: WO1 Nate Galloway, (866) 992-7641, ext. 5238 or local 772-5238 or nathan.galloway@wy.ngb.army.mil.

ANG: TSgt Angie Bohr, (866) 992-7641, ext. 6457 or local 772-6457 or angela.bohr@wyche.yang.af.mil.

INDEFINITE ID CARDS

Just a reminder, effect last Sep 05, all military spouses and widows, age 75 and older can now be issued a permanent (indefinite) ID card. Contact a hotline shown above to arrange.

60TH WY ANG REUNION

Wyoming Air National Guard retirees are again reminded to mark their calendars for 8-9 Sep 2006 when the WY ANG will celebrate its 60th birthday. All persons who ever served with the unit are invited.

The reunion will be marked by static aircraft display at ANG base, golf tournament at Little America, no host reception and dinner with guest speaker at the Guard base Saturday evening. Little America has rooms blocked. To reserve a room call 1-888-709-8384. Special rate group code is A908.

Souvenirs commemorating the occasion will be available. Interested persons watch the WY ANG web site as details unfold <http://www.wyche.yang.af.mil/>.

OBITUARIES

Each edition we dedicate this portion of the newsletter to honor those individuals of our Wyoming National Guard family we have lost over the past few months.

DIXIE L. ARCHER, 70, died 23 Nov 05 in Cheyenne. Dixie was the widow of the late SMSgt Howard Archer Jr., who was a long time WY ANG member, who had retired 31 Mar 88 and died in Oct 95. Dixie was born 31 Mar 35 in Casper, WY.

FREDERICK R. (FRED) BENEDICT, 74, died 15 Dec 05 in Cheyenne. Fred was born 9 Aug 31 in Marysville, KS. He joined the WY ANG on 9 Jan 51 while attending college and was activated with the unit during the Korean War. He was honorably discharged from WY ANG 8 Jan 54.

CLARENCE H. (SCOTT) COFFEY, 75, died in Powell, WY, on 5 Jan 06, after fighting a battle with cancer. Scott was born in Memphis TN, on 7 Jun 30. He began his military career with the USAF (May 49-Sep 54). He joined WY ARNG in Cheyenne 27 Oct 56 as SGT and was appointed a 2LT FA 13 May 57. Scott moved to Powell in 1962 to begin his 28 year career as a junior high teacher and became a member of the 300th AFA Bn. He progressed through the ranks to where he was appointed a COL on 20 Apr 81 and was transferred to USAR as WY liaison officer to Hq 6th US Army on 24 Jan 82. Scott was transferred to Retired Reserve Apr 86.

GALE KAMERZELL CORBIN, 65, died 12 Jan 06 in Cheyenne after a long battle with breast cancer. Gale was the widow of SFC Norman D. Kamerzell, who was a full time WY ARNG technician in US-PFO and died on 17 Feb 77. She then married MSgt Ed Corbin in 1995 who has since retired from WY ANG. Gale was born 11 Dec 40 in Sheridan, WY.

JACK E. GALE, 65, died 23 Nov 05 in Cheyenne. He was born 17 May 1940 in Cheyenne and had lived there all his life. He was the father of retired full time technician SFC Douglas Gale. Jack served in US Army from Mar 58 to Jun 60. He joined Co C 1022d Engr Bn, WY ARNG 24 May 61 and remained with WY ARNG until 1966. He rejoined as member of WY ARNG 67th Army Band in Nov 72 and remained there until 1975 when he joined 153d Combat Support SQ, WY ANG. Jack stayed with ANG

until 1981 when he rejoined WY ARNG. He was discharged from military service Dec 1983.

JOSEPH C. (JOE) DALY, 70, died 22 Nov 05 at his Fort Collins, CO home after a brief battle with lung cancer. Joe was born 19 Sep 35 in Ogden, UT, graduated from Cheyenne High in 1953 and served over 39 years in WY ANG. He enlisted in WY ANG on 9 Mar 55, served on active duty with USAF from Oct 55 to Feb 57 when he was appointed 2LT in 187th Ftr Sq, WY ANG 2 Feb 57 and flew F-86s. Joe progressed through the ranks until he was appointed a BrigGen on 30 Jun 1989. He was transferred to the Retired Reserve 9 Mar 1994. BrigGen Daly was a great pilot and was heard to say his favorite mission was fighting forest fires in the C-130. He always wanted to be just known as a "guy named Joe."

WILLIAM ROBINSON HUGHES, 85, died 27 Sep 05 in Colorado Springs CO and was born 4 Jun 20 in Knoxville, IL. He enlisted in Tp B, 115th Cav Rgmt WY NG 22 Feb 41, was immediately inducted into military service with the unit for WWII and discharged from AD and WY NG 16 Dec 46. He reenlisted in 300th AFA Bn 9 Aug 50 and served as 1SG of Btry B in the Korean War. William went from WY ARNG to RA Mar 54 where he remained until 1971 when he was retired from RA as 1SG E8 after completing over 27 years of military service.

R. WILLIAM (BILL) LUCERO, 73, died 17 Oct 05 in Cheyenne and was born 6 Mar 32 in Cheyenne. He enlisted in WY ANG 27 Oct 49, was activated with the unit for the Korean War where he saw military service in England, Libya, North Africa, Germany and Korea. He was separated from WY NG 6 Apr 64 as SSG.

GORDON WAYNE TANNER, 80, died 5 Dec 05 in Cheyenne and was born 11 Jan 25 in Lander, WY. Gordon served in the US Navy during WWII for 3 years followed by 4 years in the USNR. He joined the Lander WY ARNG unit 26 Aug 55 and remained there for 6 years. Gordon then reenlisted in HHB 115th FA Gp as SSG 24 Apr 72, progressed through the ranks until 1 Feb 83 when he was promoted to SGM E9. He was transferred to the Retired Reserve at age 60.

EDWIN LEE (ED) SCHREINER, died 24 Jan 2006 in Cheyenne of a heart attack while doing what he loved, playing golf. He was born 3 Aug 1937 in Minatare, NE, and had lived in Cheyenne since 1941. Ed was drafted into the US Army during the Vietnam War from 7 Jul 60 to 6 Jul 62. He joined the WY ANG as SSgt 19 Jan 1963. He subsequently became a full time technician as an aircraft mechanic. Ed progressed through the ranks until 6 Oct 1987 when he was promoted to CMSgt E9. CMSgt Schreiner transferred to the Retired Reserve and retired from civil service on 18 Jan 1994.

(Obituaries continued on next page)

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INFORMATION SOURCES: Sources for information published in this newsletter are gathered from federal, state and private organization publications. Consult with the editorial staff for exact source.

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RONALD K. THORNBURG, 74, died 16 Nov 05 in Cheyenne and was born 31 Dec 30 in Burr Oak, KS. He enlisted in WY NG 30 Dec 48 and was inducted into federal service with the 141st Tank Bn for the Korean War. He was separated from WY NG 5 May 52.

HERALD (BUD) GALLINGER, 88, died 19 Jan 06 in Lander, WY. He was born 19 Nov 17 on a ranch near Kaycee, WY but his family moved to a ranch near Lander in 1923. Bud began his military career when he was activated with WY NG 115th Cav Rgmt in 1941 for WWII. He became a highly decorated WWII combat veteran of the European Theater, receiving the Bronze Star. He served continuously on active duty in the US Army for 28 years, retiring as a Regular Army Colonel on 31 Oct 1969. He then returned to Lander and what he loved, ranching. His last active duty assignment was as the Senior Army Advisor to WY ARNG. Alan Bourne sent us an interesting tidbit: "Bud was one of 8 people who carried the units' colors to the end of WWII. In Europe it was a provisional unit designated 115th Cav Gp whose mission was to drive their vehicles, hither, thither and yon to confuse German intelligence according to Bud." That may be why the 115th colors today have 2 Central Europe streamers.

MICHAEL C. PARROTT, 49, died 10 Nov 2005 in a military hospital in Balad, Iraq as the result of injuries sustained from enemy fire earlier that day. He was born 13 Dec 55 in Waynesville, NC. He had previously served in US Army from 1976-1980 and USAR 1980-1993. SSG Parrott joined HHB, 115th FA Bde 17 Sep 03 and deployed with the unit to Kuwait for one year. He volunteered to return to combat and was assigned to the 1-110th Bde Combat Team, PA ARNG. SSG Parrott was posthumously promoted to SFC.

MAINTAINING CURRENT ADDRESSES

The price of USPS mailing continues to raise. Therefore it is imperative we maintain current addresses for this newsletter. It is sent by bulk mail for which the USPS will not return mis-sent mail with correct address unless sender pays the same amount again. Please post us with address changes.

MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS (MFH)

During 2005 WY ARNG participated in performing MFH for 185 veterans of all services across the state; an increase of over 300% from 2004. There were 874 WY ARNG soldiers participating in those honors with 29 of those participating completing 10 or more honors. 6 contracts were established with American Legion posts and VFW posts, paying \$1750 to those organizations over the last 4 months of the year. It is hoped MFH participation can double in 2006 by establishing more partnership programs and performing MFH in communities where they have not occurred before.

This year the Honor Guard Teams will be provided ceremonial dress blues for their participation in the MFH program. Uniform for enlisted male will be the standard dress blue with ceremonial belt. Uniform for enlisted female will be standard female dress blue trousers and jacket with ceremonial belt and male shirt, tie and hat. The uniform is as prescribed by NGB and a nationwide buy for all states is under way. It is hoped all MFH performed by WY ARNG soldiers will be in dress blues by this summer.

Program continues to grow thanks to soldiers who volunteer to participate, support received from leadership and VSOs who have established a partnership program. Non participating VSOs are encouraged to establish a partnership program with WY ARNG for performing MFHs. Call Jim Burnell for details at 866-992-7641 ext 5136 or (307) 772-5136.

LOST AND NOT FOUND

Help! We still have several retirees we have lost track of and cannot relocate. ARNG: SPC Joseph Brigman, Timothy Carroll, CPT Stephen Davis, Gary Decker, Vincent Defler, Thomas Florence, LTC Gary Kelly, CW4 Stephen Kelly, Gary Krause, Michael Lambert, Valerie, Martinez, David Odell, SGT Bernard Rivera, CW3 Gary Ross, SFC Kathryn Sabo, LTC Dewey Spreng and Floyd White. ANG: CMSgt John Aker, MSgt David Baker, MSgt Deanna Cowan, TSgt David Graham, Brenda Hamar, Howard Joy, LtCol Noreen Kelly, Don Moore, CMSgt Jack Morrison, David Rupert, Carol Russell, MSgt Gary Schwartz, LtCol William Slinger and MSgt Brent Stille.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

We continue to utilize email to convey information of an immediate nature. We hope some day to be able to utilize the Internet in providing the newsletter, however, it is not yet feasible. Out of over 1400 retiree/widow mailings, we have less than 300 to show they possess email. In fact, some forget to inform us when they change providers or addresses and we lose contact. Notify us if you want to continue or start to be a part of this elite group at RHolmes632@aol.com.

NEWSLETTER NOW ONLINE

Do you own a computer? If so, you can now obtain the most current copy of this Wyoming Military Department (WMD) Wyoming National Guard Retiree/Wyoming Veteran Commission Newsletter online. It is in PDF format, requires your computer possess Adobe Reader program, and found at <http://www.wy.ngb.mil/PAO/retiree.pdf>.

PROPOSED TAX BREAK

For the past year, the Military Coalition has pushed for legislation that would allow pretax payment of health premiums for military retired. Currently active federal workers and private sector employees can pay their health insurance premiums with pretax dollars but military members and retirees cannot. Rising health care costs affect everyone and it is essential to ensure all are provided the same benefit. Two key bills in the 109th Congress that would correct this issue are HR 994 and S484. If legislation was enacted, premiums paid for TRICARE supplements, TRICARE Retiree dental plan, long-term care insurance, TRICARE Prime enrollment fees, etc. could be paid with pretax dollars.

MEDICARE PAYMENTS

The 4.4% Medicare physician payment cut scheduled for 1 Jan 06 was repealed at the last moment on 1 Feb, but payments were frozen at the 2005 rates. However, congress was so slow moving that payments were paid with a 4.4% reduction during Jan 06. Medicare will automatically adjust those payments and pay doctors the shortage with one check, however, it may be July before all claims are reprocessed. Doctors who stopped seeing Medicare patients because of the 4.4% cut will be given 45 days to rejoin the program.

SBP OPEN SEASON

Congress set a one year open enrollment period (1 Oct 05-30 Sep 06) to allow all retirees to enroll in the Survivor Benefit Program (SBP) or increase the amount. Why? Because the Widow Tax (Formerly Age 62 SBP Offset) will be eliminated over the next 2 years.

The congressionally authorized open season is only an opportunity to elect or increase SBP coverage. It is not an open season to reduce or cancel any coverage. There are only 2 groups not eligible to make an open season election: 1st. Retired soldiers who terminated coverage during the 1998-1999 SBP disenrollment period or those who terminated coverage between 25th to 36th months of initial receipt of retired pay. They signed a statement at time of the termination saying: "Once I discontinue SBP, I cannot reenter the plan." 2nd. Soldiers who retired after the open season started (1 Oct 05) and declined coverage at time of retirement. Law specified that to be eligible, a person must have been entitled to retired pay or would be entitled but not yet reached age 60 on 1 Oct 2005.

DOD has created a tool to calculate cost of an open season election. It will figure both monthly premium costs and the one time buy-in cost. It is only online at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/actuary> under "SBP Open Season." For questions call 1-800-318-5298.

Election does not take effect until 2 years after enrollment. If the retiree dies before then, the beneficiary will receive a refund of all premiums paid.

COMMAND CHANGES

LTC Luke Reiner, of Cheyenne, assumed command of the 115th FA Bde, WY ARNG, from COL Olin Oedekoven, of Gillette, on 3 Dec 2005. LTC Reiner had previously been XO of the unit.

BG Howard A (Art) Dillon retired as the Assistant Adjutant General and Commander of the Wyoming Army National Guard on 10 Jan 2006.

COL Olin Oedekoven was appointed Assistant Adjutant General and assumed command of the Wyoming Army National Guard during formal ceremonies on 8 Jan 2006. He was immediately promoted to BG during the ceremonies. BG Oedekoven's full time job is President, Peregrine Leadership Institute.

ARREARS OF PAY (AOP)

When a retiree dies, the portion of the month's retired pay due the retiree is owed to the named beneficiary. It is called arrears of pay (AOP). This benefit is not the same as SBP. AOP is a one time payment. Since retired pay ceases with death, retired pay received after retiree's death must be returned to DFAS. Then the named beneficiary should apply for AOP. There are things to remember when making application for AOP.

First, the DFAS number to report a death of a retiree is 1-800-321-1080, same number to call about retired pay questions. This is not the number for Casualty Operations Center.

Second, SF 1174 (Claim for Unpaid Compensation of Deceased Member of the Uniformed Services) must be completed correctly. Blank forms can be obtained from a RSO or veterans organization. Special attention to items: Items 1 & 2, Be sure to enter claimant's name and relationship to deceased.

Part C lists those who could be beneficiaries if there is no spouse. If there are more than 2 children, first 2 enter their names in part A1 & 2, rest are listed in Part C. If there is no spouse, no children and no grandchildren, claimants can include parents or other next of kin.

Part E should be completed if the person who paid for the funeral is not the beneficiary or executor.

All beneficiaries are to sign Part F and include their address. Duplicate the form and provide the same information if there are more than 2 children to sign.

Part G must be signed by 2 witnesses.

MILITARY PAY RAISES VS COLA

Different formulas are used for military active and retired annual increases to protect both entities. Military pay is compared with the private sector to ensure it maintains reasonable comparability with a civilian worker with similar skills, education and experience. COLA controls retired pay based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) which is a formula that tracks inflation and protects erosion of retiree's purchasing power over decades of retired life. From 1970 to mid 90s retirees received larger increases. For last 9 years the military has been higher. Raises may vary each year, but in the long run both are well served.

WYOMING GIRL GUARD

Did you know there is a Girl Guard (GG), and if so, why? They are a bunch of WY NG female soldiers, active and retired, who volunteer to perform as additional duty. Present day unit is actually a reenactment of a group of women appointed by then Governor Warren to assist in the enactment of Wyoming Statehood on 10 Jul 1890. This group was appointed by Governor Sullivan to assist in the centennial ceremonies of the Wyoming Statehood by reenacting the duties of the 1890 Girl Guard. Fifteen plus years later they are still volunteering. Their uniforms are an exact replica of the 1890 uniforms. The material and custom sewing was paid for by funds raised by the volunteer members from donations, bake sales, etc. The uniforms therefore belong to the GG. Jana Keune, who works full time at WY ANG, is the current GG Chairperson. She has asked any member who no longer wishes to volunteer to participate in functions to turn in her uniform, kepi and rifle.

One very significant accomplishment of the WY GG was that 45 of them led the parade across the bridge to Arlington Cemetery for the dedication of the Women in Military Service of America Memorial in Washington DC. There were 50,000 women marching behind them. Their attendance to the ceremony was at no cost to the government. They assist with the Governor Reception each year, assist with special state and guard events, march in parades like Frontier Days in Cheyenne, etc. So the next time you see a WY Girl Guard, thank them for volunteering.

EARLIER RETIREMENT AGE

It appears the earlier than age 60 retirement is still in limbo at the present time. Two bills in congress that address the issue are S 639 and HR 783.

411 CALLS

Both residential and cell phone companies are charging \$1 or more to use their 411. By dialing 1-800-FREE 411 (373-3411) you will not incur any charges.

2006 HANDBOOK AVAILABLE

2006 Retired Military Personnel Handbook can be obtained by calling (888) 333-9335 or mail FEDweek, PO Box 5519, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Cost is \$9.95 plus \$4.25 s&h, total \$14.20.

CURRENT DEPLOYMENTS

Guard comprises 50% of the Army's combat force in Iraq and 12% of Air Force in Central Command's AOR. WY NG has done its share, the largest was in Mar 2002 when 539 were deployed which was 11% of the combined force. Since 11 Sep 2001, more than 1000 individual soldiers and airmen have been deployed at least once. At the present time WY NG has a total of 221 deployed broken down as follows:

Operation Enduring Freedom (53)

35- 187th AS, 153rd MXS & 187th AES (Afghanistan)

18- WY ARNG soldiers in Afghanistan

Operation Iraqi Freedom (168)

153- 2-300th FA (Ft Lewis for pre-training and then Iraq)

3- WY ARNG individual soldiers in Kuwait & Iraq

12- WY ARNG individual soldiers in Iraq, Qatar & Florida

133rd Eng Co returned home to Laramie on 6 Dec 2005 after spending 11 months in Iraq. They completed all their tasks as assigned without any casualties.

REALITY

DOD talk in Washington, DC, is to expand active component's role in domestic responses based on the perception 82nd Airborne saved New Orleans after Katrina. Why? TV & radio! The Army used them to their advantage. The Guard did not. The press must not be seen as an operational burden.

Reality is there were more than 6,500 Guard in New Orleans before one paratrooper. Reality is the Guard sent 30,000 troops to the Gulf Coast within 96 hours. Reality is 9 out of every 10 troops on the ground were Guard under the command of their state TAG.

In addition, Guard deployed without formal mobilization. They simply got the mission, grabbed enough supplies to sustain themselves and went.

The entire military exists today in an environment where the operational needs exceed the available dollars. Show the need, you get the bucks.

You can complete a mission but if the right people don't know it you didn't do it.

Guard needs to shape perception and tell their story.

Perception is reality!

ESGR

ESGR stands for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. Something that is very much needed, more so now than ever before, due to today's environment of continuous Guard and Reserve deployments. In Wyoming there is a committee of dedicated volunteers who promote ESGR. More volunteers are urgently needed, particularly in Pinedale, Torrington, Rock Springs, Evanston and Cheyenne. If you are interested in volunteering contact Larry Barttelbort at the WMD in Cheyenne, toll-free 1-866-992-7641, ext. 5935 or local 772-5935. He also has a cell (307) 631-2366.

YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM

WY has officially joined 25 other states in offering the Youth Challenge Program authorized by Congress in 1993. Applicant must be drug free dropouts between 16 and 18 years of age. The program is not purely educational and not purely military. It is a combination of the two with the intent of giving these at risk kids a second chance. The 2005 WY legislature approved \$1.1 million to start the program and the federal government provided \$1.7 million. Students are enrolled in the program at no cost to themselves or their parents/guardians. They are not obligated to perform any military service afterwards. Training site is at Camp Guernsey.

On Monday, 6 Feb 2006, 35 Cadets, made up of 33 boys and 2 girls, started their 5 months Youth Challenge training program. The core components include lessons in academics, citizenship, life-coping skills, civic service, leadership and physical fitness. Graduation of the first class is scheduled for 23 Jun 2006.

Nationally, about 78% of enrollees graduate. 50% of that group go into vocational training or higher education, 30% return to their hometown to work the remaining 20% join the military.

One of the key requirements of the program is to match each cadet with an adult mentor after graduation. Mentors are urgently needed. Those readers interested in becoming a mentor can either contact Camp Guernsey (307) 836-7500, or online: <http://www.ngycp.org/state/wy>. You can also contact Larry Barttelbort at toll free 1-866-992-7641, ext. 5935.

RECRUITING PROGRAM

Beginning in Jan 06 WY ARNG joined a handful of states selected nationally for their excellence in strength management to participate in a Guard Recruiting Assistance Program (G-RAP). Program is only open to traditional one weekend a month citizen soldiers. Full-time employees, retirees and soldiers who are looked upon as a center of influence in the community are not eligible. That however does stop retirees from continuing to make referrals. Soldiers who serve as G-RAP contractors received \$2000 for every new soldier they process and who attends basic training. More than 70 WY ARNG soldiers have signed up as G-RAP contractors since the program began.

USAF SPACE A LODGING POLICY
Priority 2 (Space "A") guests (retirees) can now make reservations at USAF base lodging up to 30 days in advance of arrival for up to 3 nights accommodations based on projected availability. Priority 1 customers can't bump priority 2 customers with confirmed reservations, nor can they bump them once they are assigned quarters for a specified period of time, except in times of contingency, emergency or when the base commander determines higher priorities exist.

STRENGTH GAINS AWARDS

Hq Hq/Svc Btry, 2-300 FA, located in Sheridan, received the CNGB company, troop or battery Command Team Chief's Strength Maintenance Support Award for 2005. The unit was one of 14 units in the nation selected for the award.

WY ARNG was awarded the Officer Strength Force Mission Maker Award which recognizes the states, territories or district that have achieved their respective NGB gain mission. To win, you must meet 100% of the assigned NGB mission. WY was one of 10 to win.

ANNUAL SAINT BARBARA

WY ARNG 22nd annual Saint Barbara's Celebration was held 1 Feb 06 at the American Legion Post 6 in Cheyenne. Inductees into the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara were: Rep. Illoway, COL Harmsen, MAJ Huss, 1SG Jolley and SFCs Sundquist, Conwell, Fisher, Heck, Laird, Parrott & Fox. Members of the Cowboy Cannoneer Chapter are reminded the annual ceremony is held in Feb and to mark their calendars.

TRICARE FEE INCREASES

DOD proposes military retirees under age 65 and survivors should be forced to pay a larger share of military health care costs as in the private sector starting 1 Oct 06. The new plan envisions an enrollment fee be started for TRICARE Standard, double TRICARE deductible and more than triple Prime fees over the next 3 years. Then on top of that, increase all of these fees annually by the rate of inflation. Retired officers would be charged about 1/3 more than enlisted. At this point, it appears Medicare eligibles (age 65) will be exempt from most increases. It seems the plan would apply to survivors. To get TFL started in 2002, Congress charged the \$9 billion annual deposit for the TRICARE for Life trust fund against the defense budget. Congress changed the law in 2004 to shift the TFL annual expense from the DOD budget to the US Treasury budget. However, the Congressional budget committee continues to charge the deposit against DOD budget. This has forced Joint Chiefs of Staff to choose between health funding and weapons programs. It appears their intent is to impose such large fee increases for TRICARE health benefits thus driving people to cease using TRICARE and seek coverage from the private sector. Members of Congress agree with the Pentagon that the rising costs for military health care is a concern, however, they do not agree the answer is to stick retirees and survivors with the cost. Congress has already started to receive thousands of letters from upset retirees, Every retiree and survivor needs to write their senators and representatives and voice their displeasure at being made the scape goat for DOD. The next few months are crucial as the decision is being debated. Proposed rates are as follows:

(1st number is for single cost, 2nd family)
(Rates for FY 2009 and beyond would be increased by using Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan rates of inflation)

TRICARE Prime Enrollment:

	Current	FY07	FY08
OFF	\$230/460	\$500/1000	\$700/1400
E7 up	\$230/460	\$350/700	\$475/950
E1-E6	\$230/460	\$275-550	\$325/650

TRICARE Standard Enrollment:

OFF	0	\$150/300	\$280/560
E7 up	0	\$100/200	\$200/400
E1-E6	0	\$75/150	\$140/280

TRICARE Standard Deductible:

OFF	\$150/300	\$225/450	\$280/560
E7 up	\$150/300	\$175/350	\$185/370
E1-E6	\$150/300	\$175/350	\$185/370

(1st number is for generic drugs, 2nd number is for brand name drugs on the DOD drug formulary list. Plan would eliminate any copay for generic formulary drugs ordered through the TRICARE mail-order pharmacy.)

Current FY07

TRICARE Pharmacy Copays

Retail	\$3/9	\$5/15
Mail-order	\$3/9	\$0/9

TRICARE PHARMACY PROGRAM

TRICARE Pharmacy drugs can be purchased locally through the Retail Network Pharmacy program or through the Mail Order Pharmacy. Prescriptions obtained through the TRICARE Pharmacy program are grouped into three tiers. Tier one-formulary generic, tier two-formulary brand name and tier three-non formulary. Amount for beneficiary copayments are based on the grouping. Group one copayment is \$3 for 30 day supply obtained from retail or 90 days supply from mail order; Group 2 is \$9 for 30 days retail supply or 90 days supply from mail order. Cost for group 3 is \$22 for 30 days retail supply or 90 days from mail order. Beneficiaries pay the higher of \$22 or 20% of cost in retail non-network pharmacies. Following medications classified as non-formulary unless medical necessity established: Flomax, Accuretic, Uniretic, Accupril, Aceon, Quinapril, Altace and Univasc. Patients using these should consult with their dr for formulary alternatives.

ANSWERS TO MEDICAL QUESTIONS

Q. Person is 65 in Feb 06 and starts Medicare but will not start drawing social security payments until Oct 06. How is Medicare Part B paid for in mean time?

A. Social Security will send a quarterly bill until social security payments start.

Q. Can a person drop Medicare Part D (prescription coverage) after once started?

A. Yes. Contact Medicare to stop coverage. Coverage will stop end of that month.

Q. How does a person get a TFL ID card?

A. There is not a TFL ID card. Proof of eligibility is Medicare ID card (Part

A & B) and military retiree/spouse ID card. Provider needs to send the claim to Medicare who automatically sends to TFL.

Q. A retiree family is covered under Tricare Prime. The retiree turns 65, is no longer eligible for Prime and is then covered by TFL. What happens to the rest of the family's Prime eligibility?

A. They continue to be covered by Tricare Prime as long as premiums are paid.

Q. A grey area retiree dies before reaching age 60. When is the spouse eligible for coverage under Tricare and TFL?

A. The spouse begins coverage under Tricare on the retiree's 60th birthday, whether dead or alive. The spouse does not become eligible for TFL until attaining his/her 65th birthday and is medically covered for life. However, Tricare/TFL coverage is lost forever if the spouse remarries after the retiree dies, even if the second marriage ends.

Q. Is a doctor limited on how much he can charge a TFL patient if he does not accept Medicare assignment charges?

A. Medicare limited charges are governed by Federal law. The law says a nonparticipating medicare provider may not charge a medicare patient more than 15% over the amount Medicare approves.

Q. Why doesn't Tricare come up with a simplified program for retirees that eliminates all the confusion with Medicaid, Medicare Part A & B, and all the other programs that happen at age 65?

A. There should be no confusion! TFL is a remarkably simple program that only involves Medicare and Tricare.

Q. Why can't TFL patients still get treatment at military hospitals?

A. It is not they can't get treatment, it is there is just so much room and service available and active duty members and family and Tricare Prime have priority.

Q. Military retiree kept the employer's health insurance policy when retiring from civilian employment and used it in conjunction with Tricare standard. Should that policy be canceled/suspended at age 65 and TFL eligibility?

A. In the vast majority of cases and for most beneficiaries, the combination of Medicare and TFL will pay medical bills in full.



WYOMING VETERANS' NEWS

Furnished by the Wyoming Veterans' Commission



POINTS OF CONTACT

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Cell (307) 262-0128
Executive Assistant:
Shawna Melendez,
Email: smelen@state.wy.us

NEWSLETTER CIRCULATION

If any reader knows of a veteran who would like to receive this newsletter, forward their name and address to WVC, 5500 Bishop Blvd, Cheyenne, WY 82009-3320. Or call 1-866-992-7641, ext. 5016, in Cheyenne (307) 772-5016 and provide the required information.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

This has been an exciting quarter with the assimilation of returning commissioners and those newly appointed. As expected, the new commissioners bring some new ideas to the table that will hopefully meld with ongoing programs to benefit the veterans of Wyoming.

The commission has reviewed the strategic plan, mission statement, the budget and rules of conduct as well as federal bills and made suggestions on new bills for introduction in the upcoming 58th legislative session. Presentations have been made to the Joint Interim Transportation, Highway and Military Affairs Committee, the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee. All presentations and follow up to answer questions take a great deal of time. It is the only way legislators can see how the WVC is improving the lives of Wyoming veterans, their spouses, widows and children through increasing access to VA medical treatment and improving finances. This benefits both the veteran and the state of Wyoming.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was made and implemented between the WVC and the Department

of Workforce Services (DWS) to place 5 new halftime Veterans Outreach Specialists into DWS offices to assist veterans. While a veteran can be referred to one of these 5 specialists by DWS offices, there are also now new veterans advocates in state employment offices (note: many persons refer to the DWS offices as employment offices). They are located as follows:

Gillette-Connie Brewer (307) 686-2975
Rock Springs-Andrew Winter (307) 352-2605
Riverton-William Jacobs (307) 856-9231
Cody-James Mouw (307) 587-4241
Laramie-Ron Franck (307) 742-2153
Casper-Pat Estes (307) 234-2975 and Ken Johnson (307) 233-4608
Cheyenne-Donna Lorentz (307) 777-3700 and Terry Higginbotham (307) 777-3700
Sheridan-Dan Paustain (307) 672-9775.

These individuals may have different formal job descriptions, but they are all in the business of helping Wyoming veterans. In addition to these fine people, WVC has the veteran service officer, Barry Gasdek, who travels the state, (307) 265-7372 or 1-800-533-5987. Also, a veteran can contact the various department veterans service officers located in Cheyenne at: VFW, Bob Craft (307) 778-7340; DAV (307) 433-2752; American Legion, Eldon "Skeeter" Jones (307) 433-2750. Veterans located in the western part of Wyoming needing assistance may contact the Sweetwater County Veterans Service Officer, Patty Burgin in Rock Springs, (307) 352-6641. All of these individuals are dedicated to helping veterans. Veterans just need to contact them to start the processing.

Due to excellent cooperation between Veterans Nursing Home Study Group and WVC, Phase I of the multiyear project has been completed. Phase II will determine whether or not an additional State Veterans Nursing Home should be established; consider alternative to construction of a new residential facility; consider potential funding sources; and determine potential sites for a state veterans home (if established). Phases

III and IV are in draft form and will be determined from the information gained from Phases I & II. Commissioner Craft made an outstanding presentation concerning this very important project at the 7 Jan 2006 commissioners meeting.

National Purple Heart Trail Dedication

A number of commissioners and dignitaries, including Governor Freudenthal, Senator Thomas and Representative Cubin were present for the dedication of I-80 as a part of the National Purple Heart Trail. In true Wyoming fashion, the dedication was done during a regular snow ground blizzard. Wyoming's first Purple Heart Trail sign is located at the Lincoln Monument rest stop. Remaining signs along the route are to be placed later this spring. Chairman Patty Burgin performed as emcee after driving from Rock Springs in the blizzard to make it happen.

2007-2008 State Biennium Budget

WVC requested the 2 contract employees, one in Cheyenne and the other in Casper, whose contracts expires 30 Jun 2006, be transferred to full time employee status in this budget. Request was initially denied, which would have reduced the WVC staffing by almost 40%. The commissioners voted unanimously to fight to retain these two very necessary positions during their 7 January quarterly meeting. Director Ewing and cochair Ginter met with the Joint Appropriation Committee and successfully presented the case for retention of these two positions. Staffing and funding was made for 2 years, at which time the WVC will have to again request these 2 positions be integrated into full time employee status.

WVC LEGISLATIVE PUSH

WVC's big legislative push this year was for a substantial improvement in the veterans tax exemption. The item did not get considered by the legislature, but the WVC plans to push for an increase in the exemption during the next legislative session. WVC is also supporting all Guard and Reserve bills, several are of interest to veterans. Follow up on the success of veteran-related bills will be in the next newsletter.

NEXT QUARTERLY MEETING

Next quarterly meeting of the WVC commissioners is to be held on a Saturday, sometime during the month of April 2006, in Afton, WY. WVC extends a warm welcome to any one wishing to attend. The meeting will run from 0900 to 1300. Visitors will be provided time to voice their concerns about veteran issues in Wyoming. Actual date and meeting place will be published by the news media when it is determined.

NEWSLETTER ONLINE

The most recently published copy of this Wyoming Military Department (WMD) WY NG Retiree/Veteran newsletter is now available on line. However, the Adobe Reader program is required to view it. To read, go to the department's Web site at <http://www.wy.ngb.army.mil/veterans.asp>.

VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER REPORT

Winter has arrived and many veteran events and assistance visits have been made throughout the state.

Rock Springs Community Based Out-patient Clinic (CBOC) held its grand opening ceremony in Sept. There was a wonderful turn out of veterans throughout the state to include myself, WVC Chairman Patty Burgin, VISN 19 Director Larry Biro, and Sheridan VAMC Director Maureen Humphreys. During the last week in Sept., assistance visits were made to veterans/family members in Buffalo and Johnson Country Senior Center.

WY National Guard Retiree Conference was held during the first week of Oct in Cheyenne. I had a chance to speak with many retired Guardsmen and their spouses about benefits.

Assistance visits were then made in Torrington, Lusk, Sheridan, Pinedale, Evanston, Green River and Rock Springs. Finally, I attended the WVAC meeting in Casper.

In Nov., assistance visits were made in Cody, Powell and Lovell. I was able to speak with a Marine in Powell, who was not only on Iwo Jima during WWII, but also saw the first flag raising (not the famous one). Actor Lee Marvin was one of his "foxhole buddies" when they both were wounded. A Joint Army ROTC Military Ball was held at University of Wyoming. The guest speaker was the

Secretary of Veteran Affairs, Honorable R. James Nicholson. I was invited to attend a Veterans Day Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC. Vice President Dick Cheney was the featured speaker at the event. During the later part of the month assistance visits were made to veterans in Gillette, Sundance, Newcastle, Wheatland, Douglas and Rawlins, to include a visit with the correction officers at the State Penitentiary in Rawlins. They have invited me to return at a future date to speak about veteran benefits.

In Dec, assistance visits were made to veterans/family members in Thermopolis, Worland, Basin, Greybull, Rock Springs, Fort Washakie, Dubois and Lander. There was also a commissioning ceremony at UW for the Air Force and Army ROTC. Army Chief of Staff General Pete Schoomaker was the guest speaker. General Schoomaker was a UW Army ROTC graduate and his daughter is currently enrolled in the Army ROTC program at UW.

During the last quarter of the year, assistance was given to many veterans who requested help in getting enrolled in VA Health Care. Many wanted to get medication or prescription drug assistance. Assistance was requested for VA health care, veteran tax exemption, compensation and pension forms, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, burial benefits, veterans license plate service emblem, Veterans Home of Wyoming, State Veterans Cemetery, National Guard and Reserve benefits, appeals, SF 180 for awards, DD 214s, military records and health records. Questions regarding TRICARE, CHAMP/VA, SBA business loans and home loans were also answered. Some assistance was requested for getting eye glasses, hearing aids, Agent Orange exams, TRICARE for Life information, discharge upgrades, adding missing information to veteran's records, job service assistance, VA home loans and survivor benefits.

In all, it was a very busy quarter with "Mother Nature" cooperating for the most part. Hope you all had a very happy holiday season and I wish you all a very prosperous fruitful new year.

To those who serve and assist, thanks for all you do! To veterans, thanks for your service and thanks for being a veteran!

NEW GULF WAR ILLNESS STUDY

VA is conducting 12 projects to study illnesses affecting some Gulf War veterans. The new programs will be done at VA medical centers located at Bedford, MA; Baltimore, MD; Washington, DC; Durham, NC; Miami, FL; Tampa, FL; Minneapolis, MN Omaha, NE; Salt Lake, UT; San Francisco, CA.

Call (800) 827-1000.

LEGISLATION UPDATES

All bills considered by the Wyoming State Legislature during the most recent session, as well as previous sessions, can be viewed at: <http://legisweb.state.wy.us>.

Many bills are supported by the WVC even when filed by the WMD or other agencies because they deal with veteran benefits, health and wellbeing.

A complete update of the most recent session will be in the next newsletter.

VET CENTER MOVES

The Cheyenne Vet Center moved to a new location: 3219 East Pershing Blvd. Their telephone number remained the same: (307) 778-7370.

NEW COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED

Several new commissioners have been appointed to the Wyoming Veterans Commission. For those veterans not aware of who the new commissioners are, here is a complete list:

Lee Alley - Wheatland, District 8 -

Phone (307) 322-3287

Patty Burgin - Rock Springs, District 3-

Phone (307) 352-6641

Robert Craft - Cheyenne, District 1-

Phone (307) 778-7340

Robert DeBernardo -Casper, Dist. 7-

Phone (307) 258-4097

Arlo "Al" Ellefson - Hulett, Dist. 6-

Phone (307) 467-5858

Herman Emmett -Worland, Dist. 5-

Phone (307) 347-6437

Jana Ginter - Carpenter, District 1-

Phone (307) 649-2422

Burton Hutchinson - Ethete, Dist. 9-

Phone (307) 330-6302

Lars "Pete" Quinnett -Gillette, Dist. 6-

Phone (307) 682-5354

Scott Smith - Laramie, District 2 -

Phone (307) 721-2209

James Washam - Pinedale, Dist. 9-

Phone (307) 367-6471

Ron Wood - Sheridan, District 4 -

Phone (307) 672-9304

PURPLE HEART TRAIL DEDICATION
Interstate 80 all the way across WY is now known as the Purple Heart Trail. The highway earned the honor on Saturday, 12 Nov 2005, during a ceremony at the Lincoln Monument Rest Area between Cheyenne and Laramie.

The designation recognizes veterans who have earned Purple Heart Medals. Medals bear the likeness of George Washington and are awarded to combat veterans who fought and were hurt in battle. "It is important for a state and a nation to honor its heroes," Patty Burgin, chairman of WVC, said. "This day is a small down payment toward a large bill of thanks for all of our veterans."

People gathered inside a building whose spacious windows looked over a snowy and windblown I-80. Signs designating the trail will be put up at rest stops and at both ends of the interstate. "Military Order of the Purple Heart took on the trail program about 3 years ago," said Jeffrey Roy, of the military order from CO. He went on to say, "So far, about 30 states have designated highways as Purple Heart trails. We have memorials dedicated to fallen veterans from all our wars, but we have nothing dedicated to our combat wounded veterans, which the trail project does. They are quiet veterans. What Purple Heart veterans did is they sacrificed something of themselves on the battlefield. They left something there. But when they came home they did not ask for anything, they did their job. When the people see the signs along the highway and at the rest stops, they will think of the veterans that gave something, but more importantly, who continue to give until the day they die, quietly and with honor and with service."

WVC Director Don Ewing estimates there are about 1,600 Purple Heart veterans in WY. Governor Freudenthal signed a proclamation during the ceremony designating the highway. He recognized those who have been wounded while defending their country. He also noted the state legislature has done a remarkable job stepping up and funding programs to help dependents of Guard and Reserve members deployed from WY.

"Those who have earned the Purple Hearts have given something larger and

higher than themselves," said US Sen. Craig Thomas.

US Rep Barbara Cubin said "People should take this day to remember the price paid not only by those who have gone before, but the price young people and their families are paying for our freedom today."

Pat Estes of Casper received a Purple Heart after he was wounded in Vietnam. "It is recognition for veterans," he said of the highway designation "Not just Purple Heart people, but veterans in general."

MEDICARE PART D AND TRICARE

Starting 1 Jan 2006, Medicare, Part D Prescription Drug Coverage is available to everyone with Medicare, including TRICARE beneficiaries. There are several factors beneficiaries need to consider when deciding whether to purchase a Medicare prescription drug plan. For nearly all TRICARE-Medicare beneficiaries and under most circumstances, there is no added value in purchasing Medicare prescription drug coverage if you have TRICARE. The exception to this rule may be for those with limited incomes and assets who qualify for Medicare's extra help with prescription drug costs. These individuals may benefit by applying for the Medicare low-income subsidy and enrolling in a Medicare prescription drug plan. Social Security Administration (SSA) sent an application for extra help paying for Medicare prescription drug coverage to people with certain low incomes during the summer 2005. Beneficiaries who did not get an application may request one by calling 1-800-772-1213 or apply online at: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov>.

For more information about the TRICARE Pharmacy benefits visit: www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy.

Beneficiaries should read the handbook titled "Medicare & You 2006," which was mailed in Oct 2005, to find more information about Medicare, Part D, Prescription Drug Coverage Plans available. For more help, beneficiaries can visit: <http://www.medicare.gov/> and select "search tool" or call their State Health Insurance Assistance program (Medicare & You 2006 handbook has the telephone number) or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users may call 1-877-486-2048.

VA PRESCRIPTION CO-PAY INCREASE
Co-payments for outpatient medicines prescribed through VA have been increased \$1, effective 1 Jan 06. This is the first change in VA co-pay in 4 years.

"Through sound management practices, efficient pharmacy operations and price negotiations that put the veterans first, VA has been able to contain prescription drug cost," said Secretary of VA, Honorable Nicholson, noting that co-payments paid by veterans will still be lower than similar private sector ones.

Increase to \$8 for a 30 day supply of prescription drugs is required by federal law, which based VA's first co-pay for outpatient prescriptions on increases in the Medical consumer price index.

The \$1 increase will not affect veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a 50% or greater disability. Also known as Priority Group 1 veterans, these patients will see no change in their current prescription drug benefit.

Other veterans with less pronounced service-connected ailments - those classified as Priority Groups 2 through 6 - will see their prescription drug co-pay rise \$1, but their annual out of pocket expenses for VA medicine will remain capped. The new cap will raise to \$960 per year, up \$120 from the previous level. This means veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 6 will pay no more than \$960 annually for VA outpatient medicine.

Veterans who have no injury or illness related in any way to their prior military service, referred to as Priority Groups 7 & 8 will also see their co-payments increase with no annual cap.

Not all VA outpatient medications are subject to the increase, excluded are:

- * Medication for treatment of a service-connected disability.
- * Medication for a veteran with service-connected disability of 50% or more.
- * Medication for a veteran disabled by 50% or more for unemployability.
- * Medications for a veteran whose annual income does not exceed the amount of VA pensions.
- * Medication for health problems that may be linked to Agent Orange; for undiagnosed illnesses of Persian War veterans; or for new veterans within two years of discharge after serving in a combat theater.

VA PRESCRIPTIONS FILLED ONLINE

Tens of thousands of veterans are now receiving their prescription drug refills from VA with greater convenience, speed and security, thanks to a service available over the Internet.

More than 70,000 prescriptions have been refilled using the latest service added to VA's "MyHealtheVet," the personal online health record system designed for veterans in the VA health care system. The prescription service began on 31 Aug 2005.

"The secure online prescription refill service is proving to be extremely successful in providing America's veterans with fast, easy and secure access to their important medications," said VA Secretary, R. James Nicholson. "Given the overwhelmingly positive response VA has received to this initiative from veterans, we anticipate thousands more veterans will choose to take advantage of this convenient service."

When a veteran orders a prescription refill, the request is routed to VA's computer system to be filled by one of the department's outpatient mail pharmacies. The refill is then sent directly to the veteran, eliminating the need for a trip to the pharmacy and a wait in line.

On Veterans Day, 11 Nov 2005, MyHealtheVet web site marked its second anniversary by adding three new health records that veterans can keep in a secure electronic environment and make available to VA health professionals nationwide-blood oxygen levels taken from a pulse oximeter, daily food intake in the food journal and physical activity and exercise in the activity journal.

By end of 2005, more than 100,000 veterans signed up to use MyHealtheVet, which is located on VA's web site at: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>.

Among the services available to veterans, their families and VA care providers through the online personal records are the ability to track health conditions - entering readings, such as blood pressure and cholesterol levels - and to record medications, allergies, military health history, medical events and tests.

Veterans can also include personal information, such as emergency contacts, names of medical providers and health insurance information. They can access health information on the Internet

from VA, from the National Library of Medicine, and health wise, a commercial health education library.

Future expansion of MyHealtheVet Web site will allow VA patients to view appointments and co-payment balances, access portions of their medical records and give access to their records to doctors, family members and others.

REVIEWS OF PTSD CASES

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has determined they will not review the files of 72,000 veterans currently receiving disability compensation for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to the Department Secretary for the VA, Honorable R. James Nicholson.

On 19 May 2005, VA Inspector General (IG) made a report based on an examination of the files from a sample of 2100 randomly selected having disability ratings for PTSD. The IG cited insufficient documentation in the files and a dramatic increase in veterans filing for disability compensation for PTSD since 1999 and recommended an across the board review of all PTSD cases.

"We have now just completed our own careful review of those 2100 files cited by the IG report," said the honorable Nicholson. "The problem with these files appears to be administrative in nature, such as missing documents and not fraud. In the absence of evidence of fraud, we are not going to put our veterans through the anxiety of a widespread review of their disability claims. Instead we are going to improve our training for VA personnel who handle disability claims and toughen administrative oversights. Not all combat wounds are caused by bullets and shrapnel. We have a commitment to ensure veterans with PTSD receive compassionate, world-class health care and appropriate disability compensation determinations."

VA HEALTH CARE THE BEST

A recent independent survey determined the health care veterans receive again outscored the type of healthcare given in the private sector.

Veterans continue to be more satisfied with their healthcare than the average American, according to an annual report on customer satisfaction that compares the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

health care system with private-sector health.

The ratings came in the annual American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) which ranks "customer satisfaction" with various federal programs and private-sector industries.

"Although VA has received many wonderful endorsements recently, the support of our veterans, the people who know us best, is the highest praise," said the Department Secretary, the Honorable R. James Nicholson. "This is a testament to the hard work of VA employees, the support of Congress and the leadership of the White House."

The ACSI, an independent survey of customer satisfaction within both the federal and private sectors, gave VA's inpatient care a rating of 83 on a 100 point scale. That is 10 percentage points higher than the 73 rating for private sector health care industry.

VA's rating of 80 for outpatient care was five percentage points higher than the 75 rating for private sector outpatient care, and nine percentage points higher than the average satisfaction rating for all federal services.

The latest findings mark the sixth consecutive year VA health care system has outranked the private sector for customer satisfaction.

"VA provides world-class health care for our veterans," said Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "The ACSI ratings confirm that our veterans recognize the dedicated service of VA's health care professionals."

Since 1994, the ACSI survey has been a national measurement of customer satisfaction with the quality of goods and services in the United States. ACSI produces indexes of satisfaction for seven economic sectors, 41 industries, 200 private sector companies and two types of local government services.

VA's strong showing came after interviews with veterans who have recently used the department's services. The report is the product of the National Quality Research Center at the University of Michigan Business School, CFI group and the Federal Consulting Group.

Health care services is just one of the many potential benefits available to those who served in the US Armed Forces.

CRSC ELIGIBLE NOT APPLYING

Officials estimate 85% of veterans are eligible to apply for the Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC). CRSC is a \$22 billion program authorized by Congress in 2002 for active and reserve retirees with disabilities related to combat or hazardous duties. Only \$1 billion have been spent so far. With roughly \$21 billion remaining, officials are urging retirees who believe they are eligible to apply.

Unlike the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments Program (CRDP), which is an automatic entitlement from DF&AS for any retiree with a VA disability rating of 50% or higher, CRSC is an application claim based program.

Army officials suspect that some retirees have not applied because they believe they already are receiving CRSC compensation when in fact they are receiving CRDP. CRSC is monthly, tax-free compensation for certain military retirees that supplements their VA disability pay and military retired pay. CRDP compensation is taxable and also generally it has a smaller payment. For example, the monthly payment for a 50% rating under CRSC is \$663 tax-free, while the taxable monthly payment CRDP is \$153.

Disabled retirees who are not certain which pay they are receiving should check their DF&AS pay stub. Law forbids retirees from receiving both CRSC and CRDP. To qualify for CRSC, claimants must:

- * Be retired with at least 20 years of active or be a reservist age 60 or older with 20 years or more qualifying years.
- * Received retired pay offset by VA disability payments.
- * Have a VA disability rating of at least 10%.

Eligibility for CRSC requires a documented combat related disability, which includes:

- * Disability resulting from conditions simulating war, such as named exercise.
- * An injury incurred while performing hazardous service, such as flying, diving or parachute duty.
- * An injury caused by an instrument of war (combat vehicle, military weapon, etc.).
- * Wound or injury caused by armed conflict (earning a Purple Heart) and pre-

sumptive cases involving exposure to things like Agent Orange or radiation.

Retirees who apply for CRSC must be prepared to document their claim with evidence that shows their disability meets the criteria for combat related under the conditions described above. For full details call (866) 281-3254 toll free or access <http://www.crsc.army.mil>. Or contact a veterans representative listed on page 7 of this newsletter.

VETS ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

In 2000, there were 3 million Gulf War veterans, 8.4 million Vietnam War veterans, 5.7 million WWII veterans, plus many more from lesser known conflicts. Access to VA Healthcare has very much improved since the enactment of the Veterans' Healthcare Eligibility Reform Act that was passed in 1996. Enrollment process for receiving VA benefits is quite simple and speedy. A veteran must complete VA Form 10-10 EZ (Application for Benefits) and submit to a VA facility or WVC representative. Blank copies of the form can be obtained from any of the many WVC resources. VA processes the form and forwards it to the National VA Health Eligibility Center in Atlanta, GA. The veteran will then be notified by this institution of eligibility status. There are rigid eligibility rules that determine a veteran's status and ensure every veteran receives healthcare and assistance, through the benefits established by Congress.

In order to provide the best possible care to those who most need it, the VA separates all enrolled veterans into "priority groups." There are 8 different priority groups and each group description details explicitly who falls under that particular category of eligibility. Group descriptions are as follows:

Priority Group 1 includes only veterans who are rated with 50% or more disability.

Priority Group 2 is for veterans who are rated with 30% to 40% disability.

Priority Group 3 includes several types of veterans, like former POWs, those discharged for an injury they incurred while in the line of duty, and Purple Heart recipients.

Priority Group 4 includes those who are housebound or catastrophically disabled.

Priority Group 5 is for those whose

annual income is below a certain established dollar amount or those who received VA pension benefits or who are eligible for Medicaid benefits.

Priority Group 6 includes those who are not required to make co-payments for their VA medical care.

Priority Group 7 is for those who agree to pay co-payments, as their income is above the VA Means Test threshold but below the HUD geographic index.

Priority Group 8 includes veterans who pay co-payments and have an income that is above both the VA Means Test and the HUD index.

Placement in one of these eight priority groups ensures that care is given to all, but especially to those who need it most are served first. Placing veterans in these distinct categories makes managing medical care and patients easier.

The amount of medical and treatment services included within the Medical Benefit Package is truly impressive. The package covers both outpatient and inpatient medical care, as well as the cost of prescription drugs. The package includes provisions for emergency care in VA facilities and some emergency care outside of VA facilities is also covered.

Veterans can receive bereavement counseling, rehabilitation services, professional counseling, home health services, hospice care and pregnancy care all within the scope of the VA Healthcare benefits package.

Care provided to veterans is divided into the categories of "basic care" and "preventive care" and includes nearly all medical needs that a person could possibly experience throughout the course of his or her lifetime. Only requirement is to be properly enrolled into the VA medicare system.

The complete list of medical benefits for veterans can be accessed from the Department of Veterans Affairs or from any VA medical facility. Another great source for information about VA benefits, enrollment, etc. is the full time Wyoming Veteran Service Officer, Barry Gasdek, cell (307) 262-0128 or (307) 265-7372 or 1-800-533-5987.

Most of the veterans service organizations also provide this information to those interested in learning more about the medical benefits associated with service in the US Armed Forces.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CHEYENNE, WY
82003
PERMIT NO. 7

EXERCISE PROGRAM

It is never too late to start exercising. Even people bedridden can start an exercise program. Exercise has benefits for all ages. Weight bearing exercises increase bone density and decrease risk of osteoporosis. Exercise can minimize weight gain associated with aging. In fact recent studies show people who stay physically active tend to retain more mental acuity. Experts tell us only 40% of Americans exercise regularly. Exercise can vary dependent on a person's needs and health. The key is to find the right routine. Example: A person who has trouble getting in and out of a chair could try daily getting in and out of a chair 5 times in a row, 3 times a day. This will strengthen upper leg muscles and increase mobility. No matter how you begin, pick a program goal that is consistent with your physical condition. It is better to begin with a program that is minimally challenging rather than one that expects too much. Walking, biking or swimming are good choices for beginners.

It would be wise to discuss your goals with a doctor before starting.

JROTC JOB AVAILABLE

Cheyenne Central High School is searching for a retired ARNG noncommissioned officer or warrant officer interested in serving as a Army instructor for the school's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program.

Interested personnel should research the <http://www.usarmyjrotc.com> Web site under "Instructor" and "Application" for application procedures.

LTC (Ret) Ralph Simmerman, senior Army instructor, is certified to do a face-to-face interview for applicants.

Central High School would like to conduct interviews for this position as soon as possible.

In addition to the standard Cadet Command application packet mentioned above, applicants are asked to report to the job interview with a current resume and at least three letters of recommendation.

Interested applicants may contact Simmerman via phone at (307) 771-2461 or at simmermanr@laramie1.k12.wy.us for more information.

The successful applicant would begin work after 1 Jul 06.

TO YOUR HEALTH

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the 4th leading cause of death. Deep in the lungs are tiny air sacs called alveoli. They bring oxygen from the air into the blood in exchange for carbon dioxide. There are 2 types of COPD, emphysema & chronic bronchitis. Emphysema is when the walls between the alveoli are destroyed and the sacs lose their elasticity. Chronic bronchitis increases mucus production which causes chronic coughing. Both cause shortness of breath. Smoking is the biggest risk for COPD. Some people have alpha 1 antitrypsin deficiency which results in the body not destroying harmful proteins in the blood, leaving the person vulnerable to COPD. Other risks are secondhand smoke, severe air pollution, and exposure to chemical gases and dust. Major goal of COPD treatment is to increase gas exchange. Inhalers with bronchodilator, help the lungs work better and reduces lung inflammation. Other respiratory diseases are dangerous for COPD patients. They should get flu and pneumonia vaccinations annually.